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A HISTORY OF ST. PAUL'S  
PARISH, WELLSEORO, PA



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—A HISTORY OF—

# St. Paul's Parish

WELLSBORO, PA.

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ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, WELLSBORO, PA.



A SKETCH OF  
**St. Paul's Church**

WELLSBORO, PA.

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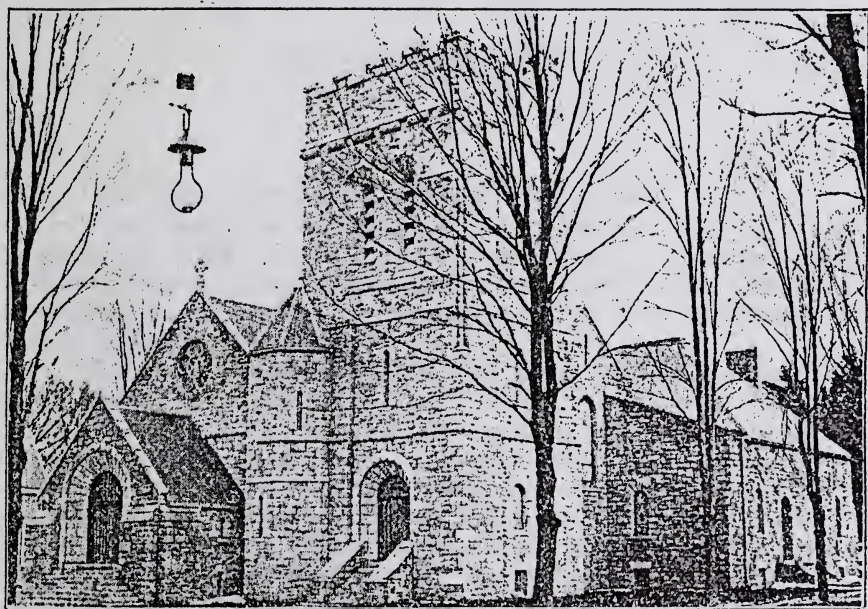
OCTOBER 26th, 1913

— BY THE RECTOR —

**REV. FREDERICK DIEHL**

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The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Church



ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, WELLSBORO, PA.





—A HISTORY OF—

# St. Paul's Parish

WELLSBORO, PA.

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Isaiah 46:9: Remember the former things of old."

To-day marks the completion of the Seventy-fifth Year of the life of this parish. All of the hopes, works, fears, and prayers of seventy-five years cannot be crowded into the limits of a brief address. We therefore will consider only two features of the many which might be considered in this connection.

First: The circumstances which led up to the organization of this parish.

Prior to the Indian Treaty of 1784, not one white settler had entered the territory now included by the boundaries of Tioga County. That treaty opened, by purchase from the Indians, this section of Pennsylvania. A few years later the first settler arrived. That honor is claimed for two different men. County historians say he was Samuel Baker, who settled at what is now Lawrenceville, in 1787. The late Charles Tubbs claimed that he was James Strawbridge, of Philadelphia, who settled at Academy Corners, in 1786. Mr. Tubbs seems to be able to vindicate his claim. However, both agree that the northern section of the county was settled about a dozen years before this part of the country witnessed her first pioneer. So far as the record relates, he was Benjamin Wistar Morris, a Quaker from Philadelphia, who came in 1799 as the representative of the Pine Creek Land Company, and the following year erected his log cabin home on the location now occupied by the home of Mr. W. D. Van

Horn. His family came the same year, that is, 1800. Soon after followed two brothers of Mrs. Morris—William H. Wells, and Gideon Wells, who settled in what is now known as Delmar, the name being given in recognition of their former homes in Delaware or Maryland (Del.-Mar.) In 1804 Tioga County was separated from Lycoming, and became a separate county. In 1806, the town of Wellsboro was laid out by Mr. Morris, who named it in honor of his wife's family. The actual work of surveying the town was done by John Norris, who moved here from Texas, Lycoming County, upon invitation of Mr. Morris to join him in forming this new settlement. The "Lycoming Gazette," issue of November 13th, 1806, contained an advertisement setting forth the many advantages of the new "county town," a town which then contained about six to eight log cabins. These pioneers were characterized by largeness of vision, but the vision took on material form, for settlers now began to move in rapidly. By 1812, or six years later, the following names were on the assessment list. Samuel W. Fisher, grist-mill and saw-mill owner; Abisha Baker, Alpheus Cheney, Sheriff of the county; Joseph Fish, tanner and tavern keeper; William Hill; Titus Ives, County Commissioner; David Lindsey; Aaron Niles; Samuel W. Morris, the first Postmaster; John Norris, first Register and Recorder; Henry Sligh, first blacksmith; and Mordecai M. Jackson. William Bache, Sr., settled here in 1812. Harvey Sligh, son of the blacksmith, was the first child born in the settlement. In 1813 the first court was held by the great jurist, John Bannister Gibson, pronounced by Judge Jeremiah Black, himself a great jurist, the greatest legal adornment of the commonwealth. At that time there was not a resident lawyer at the county town. Mail came but once a week from Williamsport, carried in saddlebags, and was so light that the usual weekly mail could easily be carried in a man's hat.

Benjamin Wistar Morris, the first settler and founder of Wellsboro, was a Quaker, and among the first buildings erected by him, after his home was built, was a small log building called the "Meeting House." It stood in the rear of the present "Advocate Office" on Main street. It was twelve by sixteen feet, small and plain, but, from all indications, sufficient to meet the needs of the day. Then as now, not every person felt the necessity of attending public worship. Services were conducted in this meeting house by Mrs. Morris, assisted by times by her husband. Mrs. Morris was a woman of remarkable dignity of bearing, and of exemplary piety. Mrs. Morris died in 1819, and Mr. Morris in 1825. After their death there was no one to take their place in the Quaker colony, and, as always when the

leader gives up the work without having a successor to carry it on, interest languished, and about 1830, from all appearances, Quaker services were totally abandoned. Without any religious services at all, the town continued to grow. An academy had opened its doors in 1824, and had prospered in a measure, but the absence of all religious services had produced an intolerable state of affairs. Financially, the town prospered; educationally, it advanced; but religiously it seemed dead. Not more than six persons professed to be Christians. Many of the adults, if they had any conviction at all, boasted that they were disciples of Thomas Paine. This state of affairs continued for about eight years. Finally, the leading citizens felt that something had to be done; the time to strike had arrived. A public meeting was held, and the question of organizing a religious movement was discussed. This meeting was attended by those who adhered to the Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches, and by those whose ancestors had been Quakers. The result of the meeting was that a minister should be procured. Then came the stumbling-block: What kind? A vote was taken with the result that an Episcopal clergyman was favored, the Quaker sympathisers voting with the church people. The choice was not altogether agreeable, as subsequent events prove. Mr. James Lowrey and Joshua Sweet were appointed to carry out the action of the meeting. They first wrote to the Reverend Mr. Smith, Rector of Trinity Church, Elmira, who referred them to Bishop Onderdonk, of Philadelphia, in whose jurisdiction Wellsboro was located. A letter was sent to the Bishop, who communicated with Mr. Charles Breck, a student of theology in the seminary at New York, who consented to come, and begin the work in this field. After Mr. Breck had consented to come, and the committee had been so informed, a second letter was written to Bishop Onderdonk, from which I quote the following:

"Dear Sir:—

We have raised a subscription of about Two Hundred and Fifty Dollars, and think it can be raised to Three Hundred Dollars. This we request you to offer the Reverend Mr. Beck, whom you named, if you think him adapted to our wants. Should he please the people, there will be no lack of means to reward his services, but, if not, this will probably be the only effort, with any hope of success, we can make in years. If Mr. Beck declines this offer, we wish you to procure, if possible, some other man.

P. S. Mr. Breck had better bring with him

about two dozen copies of the Book of Common Prayer, as there are none here for sale, and very few in the possession of anybody; some elegant, and some of a cheaper kind would be best."

Mr. Breck, now ordained deacon, came on, arriving here August 21st, 1838, being Tuesday of the week. On the next Sunday, Tenth Sunday after Trinity, August 26th, 1838, in the court-house, was held the first public services of the church in Wellsboro. The following Sunday the deputy sheriff, at the door of the court-house, refused Mr. Breck permission to use the court-house. Why? No reason was given—likely because of disappointment over the decision of the meeting referred to above. Evidently some disappointment or bitterness had been kindled because just a short time afterwards the court house was used by a religious body for public worship, and continued to be used by that body, without interruption, for a period of ten years. Undeterred by the refusal of the county officials, Mr. Breck withdrew to the school-house, and there held services until the upper part of the academy was duly prepared with a vestry room, desk, seats, and a small organ, kindly lent for the use of the congregation by Mr. Levi I. Nichols.

Mr. Breck did not find a single communicant of the church in either the town or the immediate neighborhood. Indeed, practically the entire community was entirely ignorant of the church's liturgy and offices. After two months, October 30th, a meeting was held at the office of Mr. Lowrey, when the parish was organized by the adoption of the form of charter, recommended by the convention of the diocese. At that time and place wardens and vestrymen were elected. Thus began the history of St. Paul's Parish.

Let us look at the personnel of this organization.

RECTOR—Reverend Charles Breck. One of the fourteen children of George Breck and Catherine Israel Breck, who was reared by a father and mother who united two principles for the training of their children, cultivation of habits of industry and regularity in attending divine worship. Mr. Breck graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, and from the General Seminary, in New York. He brought to this field youthful enthusiasm, tempered by good judgment, and strengthened by faithfulness to duty. Of him Mr. Reynolds, the Baptist minister, writes: "Dr. Breck occupies a very prominent place as the leader of the Episcopal Church in this county. He began work amid discouraging circumstances, but succeeding in gathering a strong church and building a commodious house of worship."



**SENIOR WARDEN**—Dr. Otis L. Gibson. Reared in New Hampshire; graduated from the Vermont School of Medicine. Brown's History of Tioga County says of him: "A model man, in those days, for any place. Did not drink liquor, did not play cards, nor use profane language. He was a tower of strength for good and for every praiseworthy object."

**JUNIOR WARDEN**—John L. Robinson. Born in Hartwick, New York; moved to Wellsboro, 1834; engaged in general merchandising, and then entered the lumber business; later helped to organize and became the leading spirit in the First National Bank of Wellsboro. Brown's History, quoted above, says of him: "Mr. Robinson was a man of commendable public spirit, and gave his support to every movement which he believed would advance the general welfare of the community. His conscientious devotion to duty, his sterling integrity, his high standing in business circles, and his generous support of the church won for him the confidence and respect of all classes." In later years Mr. Robinson became Senior Warden, and remained such until the time of his death, which occurred January 11th, 1893. Thus he was vestryman and warden for fifty-five years. Josiah H. Emery, in his "Recollections of Early Life in Wellsboro," says of him: "He was the most efficient citizen in procuring the erection of the first church ever built in Wellsboro, St. Paul's Church." What a monument to any man—fifty-five years of unbroken and unselfish devotion to the church he loved and honored!

The other Vestrymen were **BENJAMIN B. SMITH**, who came to Wellsboro about 1820; was the first teacher in the Academy; was justice of the peace, editor and publisher of the "Phoneix," and a man of infinite mirth, and one of the notables of the community; was first councilman of the borough, and, as such, insisted that the citizens keep their sheep, hogs and cows off the gardens of their neighbors by day, and keep them closed by night that the people could sleep in peace.

**LEVI I. NICHOLS** came to Wellsboro at twenty years of age, in 1828; was trustee of the Academy; also secretary and treasurer of same; was justice of the peace, and later associate judge of the county. He was the first organist of the church, as well as the donor of the instrument.

**JOMES LOWREY** was born in Farmington, Connecticut, 1802; graduated from Yale, 1824; came to Wellsboro, and was the first teacher of the classics at the Academy, being associated with Mr. Smith, mentioned above; then entered the law, and represented Tioga County in the Legislature. The historian adds: "It has truthfully

been said of him, his professional career was without a stain, and his private life equally spotless in its purity, and he was distinguished alike for his modesty and his learning, for his gentleness of heart, and his clearness of mind."

The other vestryman was JOSHUA SWEET, of whom the church records say nothing, except that he became a clergyman of the church, as if that alone was a distinguished and sufficient honor. However, from Brown's History of the county, we learn that he was the successful principal of the Academy in 1836, and was so successful that the next year his salary was doubled.

This was the personnel of the organization of St. Paul's—a remarkable group of remarkable men, even for any community, and when we remember that this was a pioneer settlement, the wonder grows. They were men trained in two leading universities, and a leading medical school; all of them educated men, all of them leading citizens of the community, and all of them distinguished by a largeness of heart, strength of mind, and purity of life; a happy nucleus around which to gather the infant church.

So much then for the organization of the parish and the events leading thereto. Let us now, in the second place, briefly sketch the growth of the young church. First: Its material growth. During the winter following the organization, active preparations were made for the erection of a church building. April 15th, 1839, the cornerstone was laid by the rector, and on December 18th, same year, the church was used for the first time, having been built in eight months. The entire cost of building was about Three Thousand Dollars, and of furnishing, Four Hundred Dollars. A little later galleries, and a bell were added, at a cost of Six Hundred Sixty-five Dollars, or at a total cost of about Four Thousand Sixty-five Dollars. This was soon raised, and on September 12th, 1841, was consecrated by Bishop Onderdonk. Judge Samuel W. Morris donated the site of the present rectory, on which, in 1850, a rectory was built, at a cost of Thirteen Hundred Dollars. The first rectory was in use from 1850 until 1873, when the present rectory was built at a cost of about six to seven thousand dollars. Dr. Breck's rectorship continued ten years, when he resigned.

Second—Let us look at the spiritual growth during these first ten years. According to statistics copied from the parish records, the following data will furnish some idea of the growth along this line. This data covers the first decade only, 1838-1848. Number of persons baptized, 200. The first ones baptized at Wellsboro were three adults:

Charles Kimball Thompson, Mrs. Mary Wells Lowrey and Mrs. Emmeline Barton Gibson. Charles K. Thompson then was nineteen years of age, and later became a physician, and doubtless is remembered by many of you who are here this morning. There were confirmed 79 persons. The first class was confirmed October 20th, 1839, by Bishop Onderdonk. It had nine members, among whom were Tobias Pinkham, Otis L. Gibson, Charles K. Thompson, Mrs. Gibson, Mrs. Lowrey and Mrs. Darling; the first one confirmed being Tobias Pinkham, who was principal of the Academy in that year, 1839. There were solemnized 28 weddings, the first being that of Charles W. Blake and Catherine Dickinson. There were 72 burials, the first being that of Archibald Nichols, December 2nd, 1838. Mr. Nichols was the father of Levi I. Nichols, one of the first vestrymen. At the time of Mr. Breck's resignation, there were ninety persons connected with the parish. These ninety persons represented the following former religious affiliations: 12 original church people, 3 Methodists, 15 Quakers, 31 Presbyterians, 10 Congregationalists, 8 Baptists, 6 Unitarians: totalling 90 persons.

Mr. Marple came October 1st, 1848, and remained until 1863, over fourteen years. When he came the vestry had changed from the original organization, containing now besides, as formerly, James Lowrey, Otis L. Gibson and John L. Robinson, these new members: Samuel Dickinson, James P. Magill and William Bache.

SAMUEL DICKINSON was a lumberman and merchant who came to Wellsboro in 1832, and conducted a large business in those days, until his death in 1866.

JAMES P. MAGILL was editor of the "Tioga Eagle," Register and Recorder of the County, Major General, Ninth Division, Pennsylvania Militia. In 1857 he moved to Philadelphia, and became active in the political affairs of that city.

WILLIAM BACHE was elected vestryman prior to 1848; was confirmed in 1856, soon after which time he became junior warden and remained warden the remainder of his life. Like Mr. John L. Robinson, he was a vestryman and warden over fifty years, and, like him also, was faithful to his duties and loyal in his support of the church. The influence of these two lives cannot be weighed. Their memory is a benediction to the parish. Many rise up to-day and call them blessed. Mr. Reynolds speaks of Mr. Marple as a "kind, scholarly gentleman, and a tireless pastor." When he resigned in 1863 there had been baptized in the parish 439 persons, and 195 confirmed. The records for one entire year—from May, 1853, to May, 1854—are missing; also from August, 1851, to May, 1852. If the rec-



ords had been complete the figures given doubtless would be much larger.

During the ten years following Mr. Marple's resignation, there was a rapid succession of rectors, no less than four having come and gone, none remaining longer than a year and a half, and four years when there was no rector at all. Concerning this period Mr. Heakes writes: "They were troublous times, times in which the parish sailed over rough water. When it became known, therefore, in 1873, that Dr. Breck would accept another call to the parish there was general rejoicing. New hopes were awakened, and confidence in the future success of the parish was restored." Dr. Breck's second rectorship began January 10th, 1873, and continued eleven years. It was followed by that of Mr. Ware, from September 1st, 1884, until April 30th, 1889. During this time, or in 1888, the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Parish was celebrated. Mr. Marple preached in the morning, and in the evening a reception was held at the home of Mr. William Bache. At that time every clergyman who had been connected with the parish was still living. Also, the senior warden, John L. Robinson, had then completed fifty years active service in the life of the parish. And now, to-day, twenty-five years later, we observe the Seventy-fifth Anniversary. To-day every clergyman who had been connected with the parish up to the Fiftieth Anniversary, is dead; also the two wardens, Robinson and Bache. Of the last twenty-five years little need be said, since most of you are acquainted with its history. Mr. Snyder followed Mr. Ware. During this rectorship, the parochial endowment fund was begun, also subscriptions were made toward the erection of the new church. Mr. Heakes followed, and remained fifteen years. He had the pleasure of seeing the new church completed. The cornerstone was laid June 29, 1897. It was used for the first time on Easter Sunday, April 2nd, 1899. The church was built at a cost of over thirty thousand dollars. It was consecrated by Bishop Darlington, October 24th, 1905. It is a building of which not only every member of the parish can be proud, but every citizen of the town as well, for at a meeting of the architects of America, held in New York not long ago, one of their number said: "The day is coming when the architect of America in search of a model will go to Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, and see St. Paul's Church." Dr. Overs followed, bringing to the parish a wealth of experience acquired through wide travel and close observation. The benefit of his unique experience in Africa would be help and inspiration to any church.

The record of the parish for seventy-five years is this: Number of those baptized, 1205; number of those confirmed, 647; number of



persons married, 586; number buried, 491: and this record is by no means complete, nor, I fear, always accurate.

So far as I can learn from records, the parish has given to the church five ministers, two of whom became bishops. They are:

First, JOSHUA SWEET—A member of the committee appointed by the public meeting to secure a minister. He was also elected vestryman at the organization of the church. After that his name is not mentioned in church records, except became a clergyman. Where he lived and ministered we learn from Brown's History of Tioga County; it was a missionary at Fon du Lac, Wisconsin; and in 1869 we find him a minister at Glencoe, Minnesota.

Second, LEWIS W. GIBSON—The eldest son of the first senior warden, Dr. Otis L. Gibson. He was rector of Christ Church, Dover, Delaware.

Third, BENJAMIN WISTAR MORRIS—Son of Judge Samuel W. Morris, grandson of the original settler of Wellsboro, Benjamin Wistar Morris, after whom he was named. Of him, his teacher, Josiah Emery, writes: "I used to think Benjamin Morris was not inclined to study, but he could write a good composition. Not always the most brilliant youth makes the most useful man." Mr. Morris was afterwards second Bishop of Oregon and Washington; was consecrated December 3rd, 1868, and died April 7th, 1906.

Fourth, WILLIAM MORRIS BARKER—A nephew of Bishop Morris, and a great grandson of the original settler of Wellsboro. He also was a bishop: was consecrated January 25th, 1893, as Bishop of Western Colorado, and in 1894 was transferred to the Diocese of Olympia, Washington, and died February 21st, 1901.

Fifth, HORACE W. STOWELL—Now rector of Christ Church, La Plata, Maryland, in the Diocese of Washington, to whom we had the pleasure of listening just three weeks ago to-day.

Many prominent laymen also have been affiliated with the parish. In addition to the names already mentioned, these are worthy of a more extended notice than can be given here: Honorable John C. Knox, Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania; Honorable S. F. Wilson, Judge of United States Court in New Mexico; Honorable L. P. Williston, Judge of the United States Court of Montana; Judge White, County Judge of Tioga; Dr. Nelson Packer, for many years a vestryman and cordial supporter of the church; Honorable Henry Sherwood, Member of Congress; Honorable M. F. Elliott, now general counsel, Standard Oil Company, New York City; John N. Bache; William B. Clymer; A. F. Barnes, editor of "The Agitator" and vestryman many years, and many others equally interested in the life of the parish.

The present organization of the parish is as follows:

#### VESTRY

Walter Sherwood, Senior Warden and Secretary.  
 B. F. Spencer, Junior Warden.  
 H. L. Blatchley, Treasurer.  
 Hon. H. B. Packer, Charles Etner, James C. Spencer,  
 A. B. Dunsmore, J. L. Snyder, Dr. W. D. Vedder.

#### LADIES' GUILD

Mrs. A. B. Dunsmore, President  
 Mrs. Frank Conevery, Vice-President.  
 Mrs. Harold Etner, Secretary.  
 Mrs. Samuel Smith, Treasurer.

#### FRIENDLY CIRCLE

Mrs. H. L. Blatchley, President.  
 Miss Mary Moran, Vice-President.  
 Miss Ruth VanValkenburg, Secretary.  
 Miss Anna Sherwood, Treasurer.

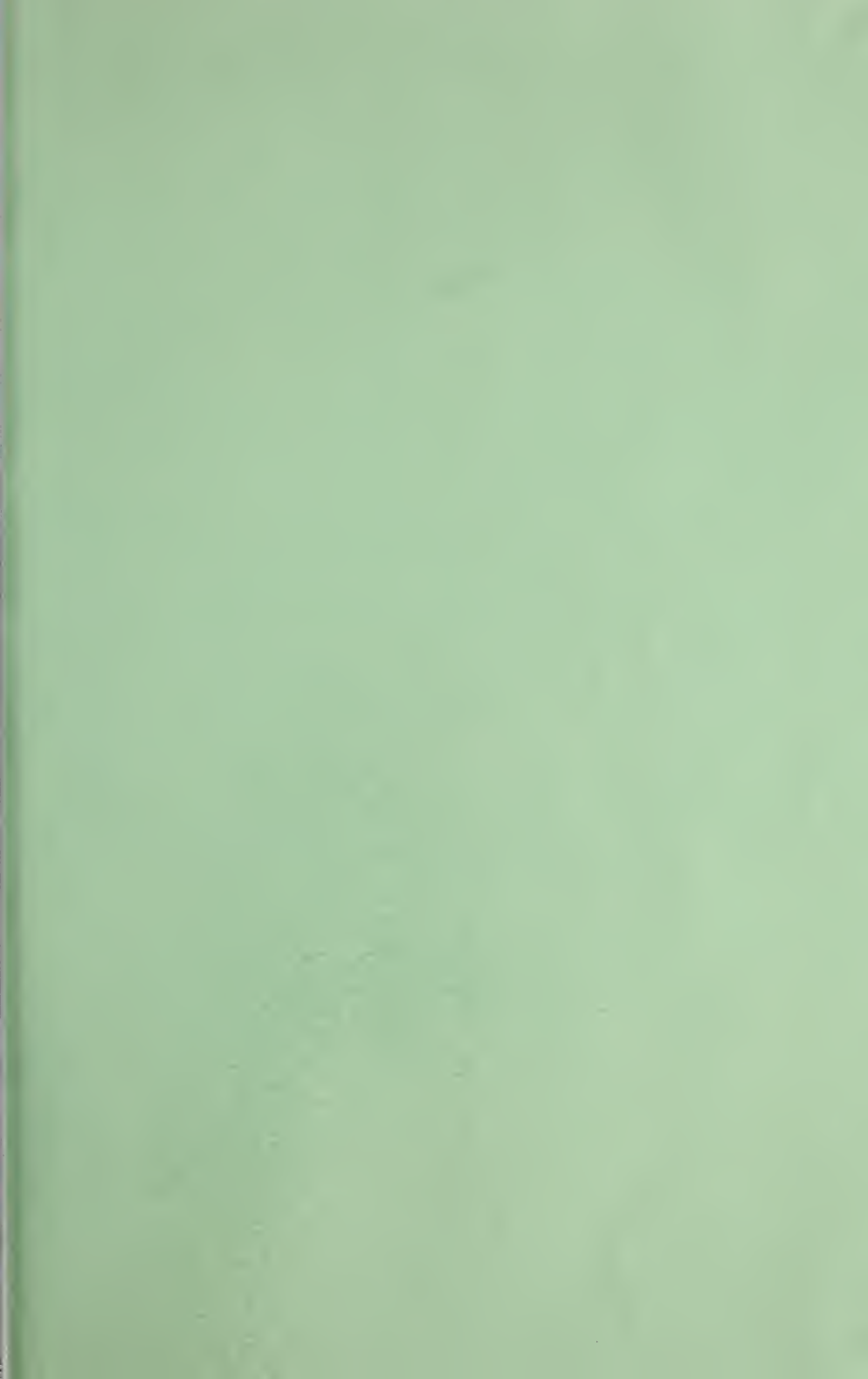
#### ST. PAUL'S SOCIAL CLUB

Hon. H. B. Packer, President.  
 Harry Sherwood, Secretary.  
 Robert Siemens, Treasurer.  
 John B. Truman, Chairman Social Committee.

#### LITTLE GIRLS' GUILD

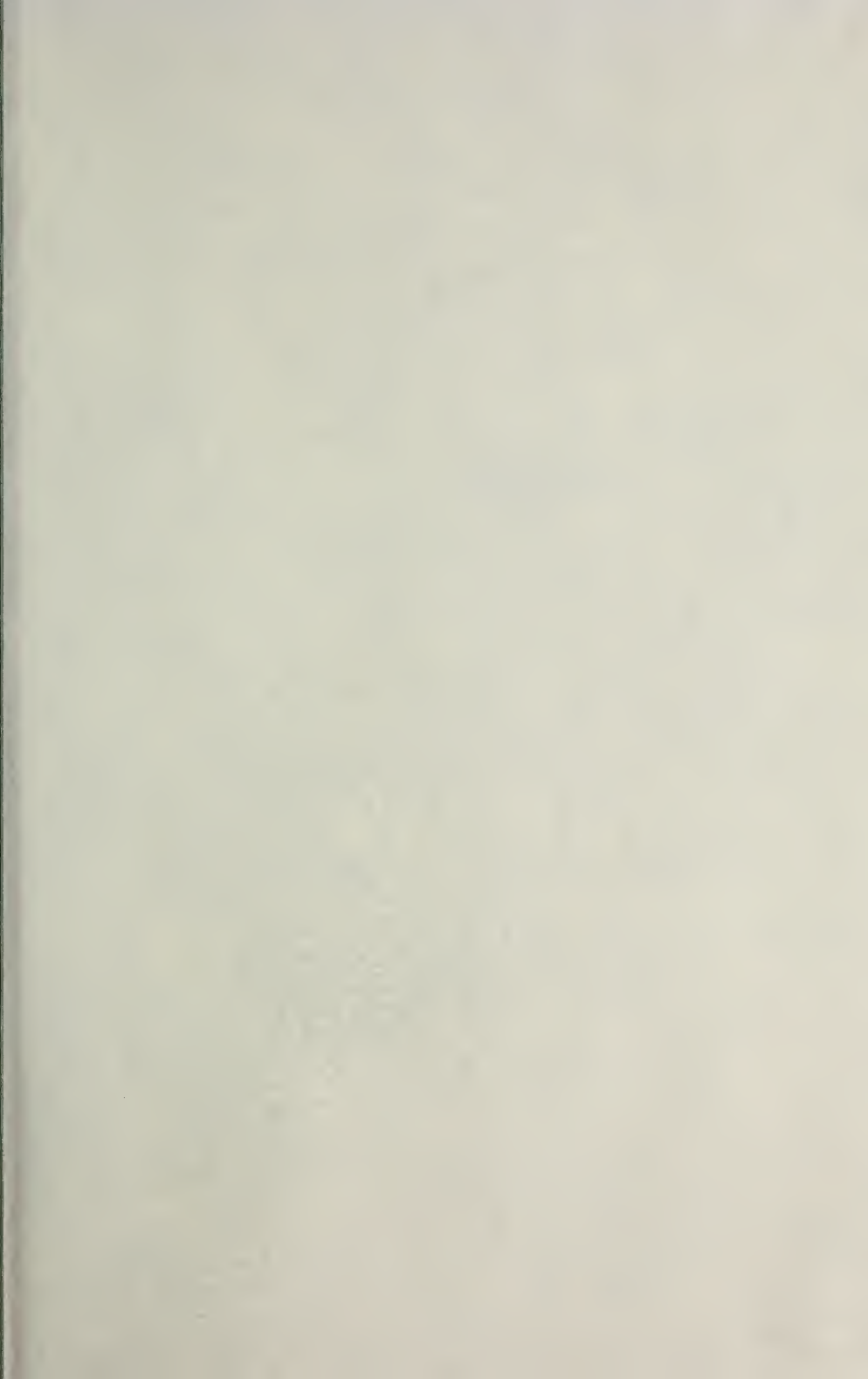
Directed by Mrs. Yahn  
 Henrietta Siemens, President.  
 Mildred English, Vice-President.  
 Mildred Vandegrift, Secretary.  
 Gladys Spencer, Treasurer.

This is a part of the story of S. Paul's, as far as it is written. These are the "former things" which divine authority commands us to remember: and why? That we may be inspired to continue the story; as we have praised the works of the former generation, let us so live and labor that the generation following us shall say of us, as we to-day say of the one gone before: "They did well their part and have entered into the blessedness of the faithful." May we loyally discharge every duty, and honestly meet every opportunity we have for promoting the church's welfare, and then, seventy-five years hence, on the One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of the Parish, the historian will add to the names of John L. Robinson and William Bache the names of other benefactors equally honored and revered.











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